

# Weekly Report

Week of March 8-12: Day 21-24

## **In the Chamber...**

The Senate Chamber was filled with a sense of duty and readiness to take on the hard work ahead as they returned from a two-week working recess. The Senate sent a strong bipartisan message to Georgia property owners that it's time to change the current property tax system. By an overwhelming 54 to 0 vote, senators passed Majority Leader Chip Rogers' (R-Woodstock) Property Tax Assessment and Appeals reform bill (Senate Bill 346), which many legislators are touting as the most sweeping property tax reform in Georgia history. Rogers has been a longtime champion of tax reform, and believes his bill will finally give all Georgia property owners a system they deserve and expect; a system that is fair, straightforward, and actually works. Sens. Steve Thompson (D-Marietta) and Ronald Ramsey (D-Lithonia) joined Rogers in support of the bill and praised the bipartisan and inclusive effort to ensure all parties' voices were heard during the process.

Sen. Jim Butterworth (R-Cornelia) led the charge to pass two bills aimed at promoting greater efficiency and overall cost savings in state government. His Transparency in Government Act (Senate Bill 389) and Paper Reduction Act (Senate Bill 388) overwhelmingly passed the Senate, legislation he hopes will help facilitate significant changes in how government agencies utilize their resources and provide information to the public.

The Transparency in Government Act will expand the public information website [open.georgia.gov](http://open.georgia.gov) to include all three branches of government, any regional education service agency, all local boards of education, federal pass through dollars and contracts and expenditures made by the General Assembly. Butterworth's Paper Reduction Act will mandate electronic distribution and publication in state government, unless printing is necessary by a legal standard.

The Senate approved key legislation aimed at protecting children, the state's most vulnerable citizens. These included a measure that allows children who are found mentally incompetent to stand trial to be placed in a secure, residential facility, rather than a state psychiatric hospital. The Senate also voted in favor of allowing juveniles to use their time spent in secure detention prior to being sent to a Youth Development Center to count toward their overall sentence.

The Senate unanimously passed the governor's legislation to improve water conservation and drought preparation in Georgia. Sen. Ross Tolleson (R-Perry) guided senators through the 12 sections of the bill, which outlines new guidelines for plumbing fixtures, programs for voluntary water conservation and partnerships state agencies. Tolleson thanked the Governor's Water Task Force and the Natural Resources Committee for their diligent work on the legislation.

Sen. Judson Hill's (R-Marietta) legislation to protect patients' medical identity was passed. SB 334 provides strong penalties to those convicted of medical identity fraud. Hill said medical identity fraud is quickly becoming the most common type of identity theft and it costs hundreds

of thousands of dollars each year. SB 334 brings the penalties in line with those already in place for financial identity fraud.

Senators also tackled government transparency, and with vast support passed SB 381 by Sen. Greg Goggans (R-Douglas). This legislation requires the Governor's Budget Report to contain a comprehensive account of all fees collected and administered. Goggans mentioned that there are over 1,800 fees written in state law and that such a large sector of the budget should be included in the governor's report so all Georgians are afforded the ability to view these specifics.

Georgia is one step closer to expanding broadband cell phone service thanks to Sen. Lee Hawkins' (R-Gainesville) Advanced Broadband Colocation Act (SB 432). This legislation will give local governments the authority to modify existing wireless structures to add 4-G broadband. Hawkins said broadband access is one of the keys to encouraging economic development in Georgia. The legislation passed by a 45-4 vote.

Sen. Dan Weber's (R-Dunwoody) bill (House Bill 906) expanding the deadline school boards have to offer employee contracts from April 15 to May 15 passed with a 35-11 vote. Weber said school boards are dealing with declining budgets and need additional time to determine the number of staff that can be hired for the next school year. The bill only extends the deadline over the next three years. Sen. Vincent Fort (D-Atlanta) spoke in opposition to the bill, stating that teachers should not be forced into employment limbo.

Sen. Hawkins took the well to talk about his common sense legislation, SB 310, which prevents unlicensed pharmacy benefit managers (PBM) from circumventing the laws and regulations. The bill provides exceptions to PBMs operating in alliance with a medical facility or health insurer, as well as penalties of up to \$1,000 for each violation of acting as a PBM without a license. SB 310 passed unanimously out of the Senate.

Legislation to include first aid training in health education courses passed with the narrowest vote of the day. SB 298 by Sen. Valencia Seay (D-Riverdale) simply adds first aid curriculum to health courses that students are required to take. Sen. John Douglas (R-Social Circle) spoke to the bill asking senators to think about the added requirements this legislation would place on teachers and schools, especially during such a tough economic time. Seay then noted that she worked with all interested parties on this legislation, including school boards and the Department of Education to reach consensus on the bill.

Sen. Doug Stoner's (D-Smyrna) bill to increase efficiency in rural and human services transportation received broad support across the aisle, which he says consolidates a system that is currently broken up between six different agencies. SB 22 establishes the Georgia Coordinating Council for Rural and Human Services Transportation, which will be charged with finding efficiencies in providing and funding transportation services for rural citizens, the elderly and disabled. Stoner presented a chart depicting the tangled web of bureaucracy in Georgia that funding for rural transportation assistance must pass through to reach the citizens who need it most. He noted that this bill doesn't create another bureaucratic organization, but rather brings together affected agencies to find efficiencies. The council will be made up of representatives from the state school superintendent and the commissioners of the Department of Transportation,

Department of Human Resources, Department of Community Health and the Department of Labor.

Many believe that public-private partnerships are an excellent way to balance state spending. Sen. Jeff Mullis (R-Chickamauga) authored Senate Resolution 822 to allow retailers to open stores in rest stops, the revenues of which will supplement state dollars to maintain the facilities. Rest stops and welcome centers are considered to bring economic growth to local areas, and with additional funding they can stay open later and serve more people.

Sen. Mitch Seabaugh (R-Sharpsburg) presented SB 351 that includes another solution to save the state money, this time by reducing the number of hours of continuing education required for state-employed certified public accountants. Seabaugh noted that when state employees are furloughed in an effort to help shore up the state's budget, it's most important that they're working and not sitting in classrooms.

The Senate also voted to pass Sen. Buddy Carter's (R-Pooler) SB 390 that exempts conservation easements from the process cities must follow when they dispose of property, while also clarifying how cities can lease property.

Senators revisited Sen. Jack Murphy's (R-Cumming) bill that allows restaurants near a housing authority to sell alcohol. The Senate passed similar legislation last year, and again voted in support of the bill with a 33-18 vote. Murphy said liquor stores are already allowed to operate near a housing authority, while restaurants are currently prohibited from serving alcohol.

Other bills passed included SB 340, authored by Sen. Seth Harp (R-Midland), which requires private and public schools to adopt a reporting system for determining HOPE eligibility for freshmen, sophomore and junior high students. These reports will be used to notify schools and parents of potentially eligible students. Sen. Ed Harbison (D-Columbus) led the Senate to unanimously pass SB 313, which requires every testimony heard by Grand jury is sworn in under oath. SB 322 by Sen. Chip Pearson (R-Dawsonville) provides that all covenants created before a county or municipality adopts zoning laws will continue to be effective until the expiration of that covenant. SB 322 received unanimous passage out of the Senate.

Sen. Goggans captivated the Senate with a glimpse of the state's innovative telemedicine technology. Telemedicine allows doctors in cities and urban areas to electronically see and treat patients in rural areas of the state. Dr. Debra B. Lister from Douglas joined the Senate from her office 200 miles away, and gave insight into the progress of telemedicine.

The Senate was flooded with a sea of green as Sen. Carter recognized the Savannah St. Patrick's Day Parade Committee, including Chairman Harry C. "Copie" Burnett IV and Grand Marshal Dennis Michael Herb, Sr. The St. Patrick's Day Parade Committee was formed in 1926, and produces one of the largest celebrations in the nation.



*Senate welcomes Savannah St. Patrick's Day Parade Committee*

Sen. Rogers presented the schedule for the next two weeks. Under this schedule, the legislature will reach Crossover Day on Thursday, March 25, the deadline for bills to cross from one chamber to another.

## Committee News

### Special Judiciary

The Senate Special Judiciary Committee, chaired by Sen. John Wiles (R-Kennesaw), reconvened after the two week recess to continue deliberations on Sen. Seabaugh's Common Sense Lawful Carry Act (SB 308). The bill was heard for the first time in committee on Feb. 15. Committee members were given time to review the bill and work out any details with Seabaugh before the next hearing.

"This legislation has two purposes – to remedy confusion in the current law and bring continuity to the process of licensing and regulation," said Seabaugh in the first hearing. "Lawfully carrying citizens want to follow the laws and law enforcement officers want to be able to enforce the law. We must eliminate the 'gotcha' situation out of any law we can."

Seabaugh did make concessions to the bill through the legislative process. The committee substitute included clear definitions of unauthorized locations as a place of worship and a bar, unless permitted by the owner. Clearer penalties for infractions of carry laws were added along with the addition of criminal trespass involving a weapon. A voluntary training component for an enhanced weapons license has also been added to the legislation.

The Board of Regents (Regents) continued their opposition to allowing firearms on college campuses, stating their desire for no change to the current law as it pertains to colleges and universities. Seabaugh did concede that portion of SB 308 stating that Regents "will still retain the right to establish regulations about firearms on their grounds." Tom Daniel, senior vice chancellor for the University System, reiterated Regents' objections to changing the law and said, "We will have to agree to disagree on this issue." Chairman Wiles reminded Daniel that this adjustment to the committee substitute was discussed with them and this was the compromise.

Sen. Donzella James (D-Atlanta) stated her concerns that this legislation would allow anyone, anywhere to carry a gun and fears crime will only increase. After some further discussion from the committee, Seabaugh's Commonsense Lawful Carry Act was passed out of committee with a vote of 7-1. James was the only dissenting vote.

Sen. John Crosby (R-Tifton) presented a bill that would give juvenile delinquents credit for time served toward their period of confinement (SB 400). Current law states that, when a juvenile is ordered to be confined in a youth development center (YDC), time spent in secure detention subsequent to the order and before placement in the YDC will count toward the period of confinement set by the order. This bill removes the qualifier "subsequent to the date of the order" so that any time spent by a juvenile in secure detention prior to being sent to the YDC will count toward his/her sentence.

Current law also states that every person convicted of a crime will receive credit for time served in confinement awaiting trial and/or sentencing, *except in juvenile court*. This bill removes that exception, so that defendants in juvenile courts will also receive the benefit of this statute.

Also, the maximum number of days that a court may order a child to serve in YDC will be increased from 30 to 60 days; however, this increase will not occur until July 1, 2012. SB 400 passed out of committee with unanimous consent.

### Public Safety

After the Senate returned to Session, the Public Safety Committee voted on two pressing issues: teen texting while driving and immigration reform. Both issues had been heavily debated during previous meetings and committee members were eager to get down to business after a two week break. SB 360, the teen texting bill sponsored by Chairman Jack Murphy (R-Cumming), attempts to prevent needless wrecks and deaths that can occur when young, inexperienced drivers text while behind the wheel. Those 18 years of age or younger would be prohibited from participating in any cellular activity, not associated with spoken communication. Sen. Emanuel Jones (D-Decatur) encouraged the committee to consider adding an educational element to the law which would help youth to better understand the risks of distracted driving, while Sen. Bill Jackson (R-Applying) expressed his concern that the bill would "over punish" young adults. The bill passed unanimously and will move on to the Rules Committee.

Committee members moved their attention to SR 570, the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Bill. SR 570, sponsored by Sen. Nan Orrock (D- Atlanta), would urge Congress to reject any legislative efforts to enact unfair and ineffective immigration policies. Orrock stressed that states are being forced to make tough decisions when it comes to illegal immigrants because the federal government is failing to act. The bill passed the committee with much debate and a 5-4 vote. Those voting against the resolution included Sens. Sims, Carter, Jackson and Douglas

### Education and Youth

A bill that gives schools greater flexibility to use their appropriated funds and allows class size adjustment was discussed by the Senate Education Committee. Reps. Brooks Coleman (R-Duluth), chairman of the House Education Committee, and Tom Dickson (R-Cohutta) presented

House Bill 908 with a firm belief that this legislation would aid schools in handling the current budget gaps.

Coleman explained this bill is the result of several months of preparation. A small task force of House and Senate Appropriations members gathered last fall to tackle the budget crisis by meeting with superintendents from all over Georgia. HB 908 was created as a result of these meetings.

The ultimate goal of the bill is to give schools greater flexibility with their money and with class size. HB 908 will allow schools to circumvent several expenditure controls without penalty so they can redirect money to where it is most needed. These funds will not be funneled to salaries; it will be strictly used for instructional purposes and staff development. Schools are mandated to have 180 instructional days and ten planning days. This bill allows schools to waive up to ten days, with no more than five instructional days, if it appears revenues will not meet expenditure requirements.

The second part of HB 908 relates to class size. Scott Austensen with the Department of Education testified that if one or two more students are added to every classroom, the state could save \$500 million. With HB 908, elementary schools will be able to work under a system-averaging approach. Classes can have more than the required amount of students as long as the class sizes average out to the maximum number they are required by law to have in each classroom. This bill also allows the State Board of Education to provide a blank waiver to all local school boards to adjust the class size. This ability will only take effect if expected expenditures are greater than the expected income for that school year. This legislation will be in affect upon the governor's signature and expire after the 2012-2013 school year.

The long line of witnesses included several teachers that testified against the bill. They explained that they felt that additional students in the classroom would be detrimental to test scores and the safety of the children. Transparency in the process was also a major concern. It was felt that notices should be sent out if local school boards are going to consider adding children to the classroom so that a fair hearing could be held. They also suggested HB 908 expire after the 2011-2012 school year, instead of the following school year.

The committee passed HB 908 out of committee by a 6-5 vote.

### Transportation

The Senate Transportation Committee, chaired by Sen. Mullis convened and began discussion on the reorganization of the Georgia Department of Transportation (DOT) Board of Directors. Mullis presented SB 448 and enabling SR 1126, which would amend the State Constitution to limit DOT Board members to two-year term limits to coincide with legislative term limits. Mullis believes that since the legislature elects the board, then DOT Board members should have the same term limits to make them more responsive to the legislature.

Sen. Steve Thompson strongly cautioned Chairman Mullis and the rest of the committee away from this legislation. He stated that this would put the state back 50 years and undo all the progress the legislature has made to fix the damage done by all the corruption from then.

Thompson thought this was the “biggest power grab in 50 years” and would give the governor and legislature too much political power over transportation. He did understand the position of the chairman and committed to working with him to improve the bill.

Many committee members spoke in favor of some sort of change to the Board’s term limits, noting that some board members from their districts have little to no contact with them. Sen. Douglas spoke in favor of change, especially since his Senate District crosses over five Congressional Districts. Board members are elected by the State Legislature according to U.S. Congressional Districts.

Sen. Seay applauded the good intentions of the chairman and noted the bill’s worthiness of further discussion. She motioned to table the bill. Chairman Mullis commended the committee’s valuable comments and willingness to work together. He noted that this is “the committee’s bill now” and agreed to table. Because the bill is a Constitutional Amendment, it will require a 2/3 vote in the Senate and House to pass and get on the November 2010 ballot.

Sen. David Shafer (R-Duluth) returned to the Transportation Committee to have SB 354 voted out of committee. SB 354 simply clarifies the standard by which a road can be abandoned by local governments. It does not change the procedure for abandoning a road. Once local governments abandon roads, they belong to the residents or businesses along that road. Shafer’s bill allows local governments to go through the procedure of removing a road if the road system is “not in the public interest.” Currently, local governments can only go through the process of removing a road if it has “no substantial public purpose.” Shafer cleared up any questions as to procedures with committee members prior to the hearing and his bill passed unanimously.

## Judiciary

A controversial bill to prevent children being treated as criminals who are forced into prostitution drew both passionate support and vehement opposition from a wide variety of interested parties. Nearly 20 witnesses testified in the Judiciary Committee on SB 304, authored by Sen. Unterman which would steer these children into rehabilitation programs rather than prosecuting them as delinquents. Many child advocacy groups and religious organizations support the bill, saying that it treats these children as victims, not criminals. Those against the measure say the bill decriminalizes prostitution, and will only serve to spread such activity across the state. The committee only heard testimony on the bill, and will take up the bill for a vote after expected further revisions and testimony. SB 304 has already undergone extensive changes, as the original language mandated that only those 16 or older could be charged with prostitution, but that language was met with opposition from juvenile court judges and others.

Members did vote to pass another bill of Sen. Unterman’s which allows children who are found to be incompetent to stand trial to receive treatment at secure, residential facilities, rather than at a state psychiatric hospital. Under SB 391, which received unanimous passage from the committee, the Department of Behavioral Health and Development Disabilities will have the authority to place these children in such a facility that proponents say is more developmentally appropriate than putting them with adult patients.

## Government Oversight

Sen. Judson Hill presented two bills, SB 399 and 398, to the Government Oversight Committee that concern heavily contested health care issues at both the state and national level. SB 399 will halt any measure from the federal government that would impose health care reform on citizens of this state. SB 398, which also deals with health care, would require that Medicaid payment information be made available to the public through a state run website.

SB 399 will prohibit state departments or agencies from implementing any part of federal health care reform unless they first give a report to the General Assembly detailing the cost and scope of such measures. The State Legislature would then have to pass legislation that specifically authorizes the implementation of the federal reform provision. Hill reiterated that if the federal government handed down an unfunded mandate, he wanted the legislature to be prepared to prevent such measures from crippling Georgia's already weakened economy. Sen. Harp probed Hill to clarify how this bill would stop a federal mandate from being enacted. Hill responded that the core issue of health care reform requires Medicaid expansion which would call for legislative action by the General Assembly.

SB 398 requires the commissioner of public health to implement a program to make nonaggregated information collected under the federal Medicaid Statistical Information System available through the Department of Community Health (DCH) website. Moreover, this information must be de-identified in accordance with federal HIPPA rules and regulations. It will be the commissioner's responsibility to ensure that the information on the website is easily accessible to the public and up to date, with the information updated at least once per calendar quarter. SB 398 seeks to limit Medicaid fraud that costs the state millions of dollars each year. However, members from DCH expressed their opposition to the bill in its current form, stating they have significant safeguards in place to protect Georgia's citizens from fraud and SB 398 will not substantially aid in recovering monies lost in Medicaid fraud. They cited the de-identification process as the most expensive aspect of this piece of legislation. While there is an agreement from committee members that preventative measures must be in place to prevent fraud, Chairman Unterman applauded DCH for complying with her requests for Medicaid information. Both of Hill's sponsored bills will have to wait until further committee meetings to find out their fate. There will continue to be discussion surrounding these sensitive topics that have long-reaching effects throughout the entire state of Georgia.

Although the majority of the scheduled legislation will wait for a vote in the coming weeks, the committee heard two bills that received unanimous support. Senate Minority Leader Robert Brown (D-Macon) presented two pieces of legislation. SB 118 prohibits anyone who is serving or who has served on a county board of tax assessors within the last twelve months from serving as an employee of that board. These types of occurrences have plagued multiple counties throughout Georgia and the bill seeks to rectify the current situation. Brown spoke candidly about this type of practice in his own district, Bibb County.

SB 143 alters the Open Meetings Act. Currently, agency meetings in which an agency is discussing the future acquisition of real estate may be closed to the public. Under this bill, this exclusion would not apply to taking final official action to approve or disapprove such an



acquisition. Additionally, this bill provides that the disclosure of meeting minutes may receive a delayed release until the parties have entered into a binding agreement as to the material terms of the acquisition. The bill, in its current form, passed through the committee with a substitute.

### Health and Human Services

The Health and Human Services Committee returned from recess ready to work. Sen. Smith's legislation that establishes legislative oversight of Medicaid and Care Management Organizations (CMO), which manage the delivery of Medicaid and PeachCare for Kids services, passed unanimously out of the committee. Both the House and Senate will select members for the committee, which will oversee consumer complaints dealing with eligibility and payment issues.

Sen Gloria Butler (D-Stone Mountain) presented her resolution (SR 986) urging the Department of Community Health (DCH) to pass regulations requiring the collection of data about Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD). COPD is a progressive disease that hinders lung function and makes it harder for individuals to breath. The disease is currently the fourth leading cause of death in the United States. The data collected by DCH would be used to assist in research and in creating disease management practices. The resolution passed without opposition.

Sen. Carter created legislation to address the growing problem of prescription drug abuse. SB 418 will create an electronic database of controlled substance prescriptions dispensed in this state, and a method to electronically review prescriptions. Rick Allen, assistant director of the Georgia Drugs and Narcotics Agency, testified in favor of the bill stating that drug abusers are taking advantage of physicians to get prescriptions. Sen. Wiles questioned if the bill would violate patients' privacy, and if their information would be distributed for research or marketing purposes. Carter thanked the committee for their suggestions and noted that he would take those questions into consideration as he works on revising the bill before it is taken up for a vote.

A bill targeted at developing, implementing and promoting a statewide effort to combat the spread of Type 2 and pre-diabetes in Georgia was unanimously passed by the Health and Human Services Committee. Sen. Don Thomas (R-Dalton) authored Senate Bill 435 because diabetes is a leading cause of death in the U.S. and its prevalence is particularly high in Georgia. Without aggressive action, the number of Georgians with diabetes will more than double in the next 20 years to more than 1.6 million people, resulting in an economic burden of approximately \$11.9 billion.

This legislation establishes the Georgia Diabetes Control Office, which will operate under the Department of Community Health's public health division. The office will be under the direction of a five-member board of trustees, appointed by the governor. Subject to appropriations, the office will have the authority to administer grant programs to promote diabetes education and prevention.

Sen. Judson Hill presented a resolution that establishes a Senate Health Care Transformation Study Committee. Senate Resolution 1134 charges the study committee with analyzing issues surrounding the availability and affordability of health insurance and access to health care

services. While the committee passed the resolution, Sen. Orrock offered a change that was incorporated into the resolution stating that the members of the committee will not receive any compensation. She noted that in light of Georgia's financial crisis, committee members should be willing to give up their per diems.

### Natural Resources

The Natural Resources & Environment Committee jumped back into action with three bills up for discussion. Committee member Sen. Steve Henson (D- Tucker) presented SB 437, which requires an additional member to be appointed to the Stone Mountain Memorial Association. The governor already has the power to appoint eight members but this addition would require a ninth member to be appointed from three candidates submitted by the city council of Stone Mountain. Recently, 50 acres were added to the park, all of which are in the Stone Mountain city limits.

Sen. Seabaugh presented SB 401, which would allow for the governor to delay compliance with any federal program that attempts to regulate greenhouse gas emissions or motor vehicle fuel economy until a comprehensive analysis of the fiscal and regulatory impacts can be performed. Legal counsel warned that the bill may overstep the boundaries that states have when complying with federal regulation. Chairman Tolleson asked that Seabaugh take the necessary steps to strengthen the bill's legality should it pass the committee. This bill passed with one dissenting vote from Henson and will move to the Rules Committee. Finally, Sen. Pearson introduced the Expansion of Existing Reservoirs Bill (SB 380) which grants the Water Supply division the power to make loans and grants to local governments to be considered in all or any part of the cost of expanding existing reservoirs. The bill also lays out specific criteria to be for all loan requests. The bill passed with one dissenting vote from Sen. Jeff Chapman (R- Brunswick) and will move on to the Rules Committee.

### Insurance and Labor

The Senate Insurance and Labor Committee passed three consumer-centered bills that aim to improve health care services for Georgians. The first, SB 411, allows individual and group health plans to include and operate wellness programs. A representative from Humana noted that wellness and lifestyle programs play a significant role in bringing down health care costs. These programs encourage people to exercise, quit smoking, and adopt other healthy lifestyle habits so that they'll have less medical problems in the future. Research shows that 90 percent of health care costs are lifestyle related. He also mentioned that 72 percent of diseases are preventable and 50 percent of cancers are preventable. The bill, authored by Chairman Hudgens, passed unanimously without opposition.

Sen. Smith followed with a bill highly favored by patient and health care advocacy groups but has drawn opposition from insurance companies. The bill makes three changes to common health insurance practices, first by prohibiting insurance companies from canceling health insurance "rescissions" based upon their allegation that the original application contained an error or omission. SB 330 also extends health insurance coverage benefits to dependents up to age 25, regardless of whether they are full-time students, and eliminates annual and lifetime caps

on insurance policies. Despite a representative from the Georgia Association of Health Plans claiming that the bill will limit flexibility and the number of products offered, the committee passed the bill out unanimously.

To ignite competition and uniformity between states, Sen. Judson Hill presented SB 407, which directs the insurance commissioner to identify at least five neighboring states with insurance laws and regulations that closely mirror Georgia's, and allow these out-of-state health plans to be offered here. This bill drew the most debate from insurance companies and health associations, who all shared concerns that health insurance companies and their products would not be subject to the same regulations and would make it difficult to enforce consumer protections. Some also argued that it could lead to higher costs for patients. Hill noted that this legislation aims to give customers more options for health care coverage in a consumer-friendly way. Hudgens represented the tie-breaking vote in favor of passing the bill.

### Veteran and Military Affairs

The Senate Veterans, Military and Homeland Security Committee unanimously passed SB 454, which would allow veterans organizations to sell pull tab games with winnings that are limited to \$500 per person per 24 hour time period.

A "pull tab game" is defined as a multilayered paper ticket containing symbols hidden behind perforated tabs with two sides. One side lists the winning combination of the symbols, the cash payout for each combination, the total number of tickets that contain each winning combination and the total number of tickets in the game. The other side contains the perforated tabs which, upon purchase, the player pulls to reveal his or her winnings, if any.

Bobby Boss, Commandant of American Legion Post 233 in Loganville, testified to the committee about the importance of this bill. He stated that the Georgia Lottery has severely inhibited his organization from making money that goes directly to the local community. Although his post uses Bingo as a way of raising funds, the American Legion has seen declining numbers and needs other outlets to raise money to continue assisting veterans and other citizens in need. The bill, which passed out of the Senate in 2008 but failed to receive passage in the House, will now move on to the Senate Rules Committee.